

STATE OF NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Financial Help for Hearing Aids Under Debate in U.S. House

Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act, HR 414, would ease burden for families needing hearing instruments

LINCOLN, Neb. — U.S. Rep. Jim Ryun, R-Kan., has championed a federal bill, HR 414, that would allow people over age 55, plus guardians of hearing loss children, to qualify for an income tax credit — up to \$500 — for the purchase of a hearing aid.

Senator Norm Coleman, R-Minn., is anticipated to introduce similar legislation in the U.S. Senate this spring.

Bill Status

Ryun reintroduced the bill, called the Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act, to the 109th Congress with 35 cosponsors on January 26. If passed, HR 414 would allow the tax credit to be utilized once every five years. It has since been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

Ways and Means, created in 1789, is the oldest standing Committee in Congress. It has broad jurisdiction on critical issues, including economic policy, international trade, social security, Medicare, and health care.

Plan Rationale

H.R. 414 is not meant to cover 100 percent of hearing aid costs, but instead provide a vehicle of support for people unable to afford appropriate assistance. HR 414 represents a simpler means to address this problem than through other far costlier measures, such as Medicare expansion or mandatory insurance coverage.



**Rep. Bill Thomas,
California, chairs the
Committee on Ways
and Means.**

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Financial Help for Hearing Aids **Continued from page 1**

A Growing Issue

H.R. 414 addresses a growing problem: the financial gap between the general population and those with hearing loss. A Department of Commerce study indicates that the overall family income of people with hearing loss is almost half that of those without the disorder.

More than 40 percent of individuals with hearing loss have incomes of less than \$30,000 per year.

Approximately 30 percent cite financial constraints as the No. 1 reason for not using hearing aids. The average cost of a hearing aid is over \$1,400 — and two-thirds of those with hearing loss require two.

So, while 95 percent of individuals with hearing loss could be successfully treated with hearing aids, only 22 percent currently use them. The effect on these families — and society — is increased special education costs for hearing loss children and pronounced lower income for them long-term. For older adults, untreated hearing loss often leads to psychological and mental disorders.

Today, an estimated 29 million Americans experience hearing loss.

Congressional Support

In addition to Ryun, neighboring state representatives sponsoring this bill include:

- Rep. Dennis Moore, D-Kan.
- Rep. Gil Gutknecht, R-Minn.
- Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn.
- Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill.
- Rep. Tim Johnson, R-Ill.
- Rep. Vernon Ehlers, R-Mich.
- Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Mich.
- Rep. Thaddeus McCotter, R-Mich.

This bipartisan initiative is also supported by the Nebraskans for Hearing Aid Coverage (NeHAC), Hearing Industries Association, Self-Help for Hard of Hearing People, the American Academy of Audiology, Siemens Communications, the International Hearing Society, and other organizations represented by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Alliance.

Bill History

H.R. 414 is an amendment to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

Ryun first introduced the Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit on September 16, 2003. Personal experience has encouraged his reintroduction of the bill in 2004 and 2005. Ryun has 50 percent hearing loss — and was not fitted with useful hearing aids until he was in his 40s.

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Rep. Jim Ryun of Kansas introduced H.R. 414 to the U.S. House.

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This legislation received considerable support in the 108th Congress.

Getting Involved

To learn how you can join other Nebraskans supporting this and similar issues impacting the quality of life in Nebraska, either at the state or federal level, contact a NeHAC representative at 1-800-545-6244.

To discuss H.R. 414, or other important issues with your Nebraska state representative, contact:

- 1st District: Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, Lincoln, (402) 438-1598
- 2nd District: Rep. Lee Terry, Omaha, (402) 397-9944
- 3rd District: Rep. Tom Osborne, (308) 381-5555

For additional information on H.R. 414, contact Emily Newton in Ryun's office at (202) 225-6601. Or, call the Committee on Ways and Means, (202) 225-3625.

About NCDHH

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) is a state agency providing education, referral information, and technical devices to aid hearing and communication between residents, businesses, and organizations. Sign language interpreter referral, interpreter certification, advocacy, equipment loan, and mental health referral services are provided. Call (402) 471-3593 for more information, or visit us online, www.ncdhh.ne.govT.

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